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SUBJECT: DONGO, KATUMBA'S RESIGNATION, AND ANGOLA -- ANY CONNECTION?

REF: KINSHASA 1080

Classified By: William J. Garvelink for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: The situation in Dongo remains very fluid, with over 74,000 DRC refugees having crossed over the Ubangi River into the Republic of Congo and up to 38,000 IDPs in the area within the DRC. The region remains too unsafe for humanitarian workers to enter. MONUC has publicly announced its plans to reinforce the FARDC. While one MONUC contact told us there is no evidence of a rebellion, another claimed that between 800-1,500 ex-FAR/Interahamwe have crossed the Ubangi River to coordinate operations with 3,000 ex-MLC/ex-FAZ. All our sources maintain that MLC leader Jean-Pierre Bemba is not directing the fighting. A MONUC contact maintained that senior Rwandan and Angolan officials told her that "they were finished with Kabila." There is disagreement whether the resignation of DRC presidential advisor Augustin Katumba Mwanke (reftel) represented a demotion of "Angola's man in Kinshasa," or a sop to Luanda, which reportedly became infuriated with Katumba over crooked oil deals he brokered at Angola's expense. Kabila's worst nightmare is for his two most powerful neighbors, Angola and Rwanda, to form an alliance against him. We do not see convincing signs of that yet, but in the shadowy world of Central African power politics, it cannot be discounted. End summary.

Dongo: More than a Fishing Dispute

12. (C) On December 6, in an attempt to stabilize the growing insecurity in the Dongo region of Equateur Province, the GDRC transferred a battalion of 600 commandos, trained by Belgium and based in Maniema Province, to the area (Note: The GDRC reportedly paid a third-party contractor to effect the transfer. End note). The unit is supposed to support the estimated 500 FARDC and 1,000 national police (PNC) forces on the ground. MONUC will also send 120 police officers to back-up DRC security forces. This follows reports that PNC units had been routed in several encounters with the insurgents. Conservative estimates indicate at least 100 people have been killed, as many as 74,000 persons have crossed the Ubangi River into the neighboring Republic of Congo (ROC), and another 38,000 are internally displaced since the intra-ethnic fighting between two clans erupted on October 29-30. The Commissioner of the South Ubangi District announced that the FARDC had retaken control of Bozene, Tandala, and Bobito, but the situation remains very fluid. There are indications that internal and/or external forces may be manipulating the conflict to promote an anti-GDRC agenda.

13. (U) Beginning on December 8 in Gemena, rumors of an

impending rebel attack, provoked wide-scale panic and population flight from the city of 300,000 inhabitants. In an effort to calm the population, PNC forces erected checkpoints on December 9 around the city to prevent people from leaving. By December 11, a degree of normalcy had returned to Gemena.

¶4. (S) Sebastian Fasanello (protect), an analyst with MONUC's Joint Mission Analysis Cell, told poloffs that, in his opinion, there was no evidence of an organized rebellion in Equateur. However, both the FARDC and MONUC view the threat as sufficiently serious to have sent reinforcements to the area. The week of December 14, Fasanello added, MONUC Qthe area. The week of December 14, Fasanello added, MONUC would dispatch six companies and two armed helicopters to the area. Once in place, the MONUC forces would have the following priorities: (1) protect MONUC supplies in Gemena and conduct joint patrols in Gemena with local police, while keeping an eye on the FARDC 93rd Brigade (Note: the 93rd is an integrated brigade with PARECO elements from the Kivus, recently transferred to Equateur Province, so there is some concern about the brigade's discipline. End note); (2) provide platoon-level escorts for humanitarian operations; and (3) provide logistical support to the FARDC as it attempts to counter-attack.

¶5. (S) Fasanello said there was no clear link between the insurgents and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC), the political party/militia directed by Equateur native Jean-Pierre Bemba, currently under arrest in the Hague. Fasanello put forward two hypotheses for the fighting. In the first scenario, it is pro-presidential

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forces, which are actually stoking the conflict to give the GDRC security forces an excuse to intervene and impose Kabila-loyal security and intelligence personnel in Equateur.

Fasanello noted that 62 national intelligence (ANR) officials in Equateur have already been dismissed in 2009. In the second scenario, former combatants have joined the tribal leaders in an effort to gain higher rank and greater salary, as was promised to many ex-combatants in Eastern DRC (Comment: In our view, both hypotheses, while not impossible, are unlikely. The fighting genuinely appears to have caught officials by surprise and any attempt by the GDRC to impose its will in Equateur could run the risk of backfiring. Second, it is widely known that the GDRC has not granted expected rank and salary to many ex-armed group commanders in the Kivus. End comment).

¶6. (C) With the security situation unarguably deteriorating, SRSG Alan Doss publicly announced that MONUC would reinforce its position in Gemena "to face any eventuality." Doss warned that there were several credible reports that heavy arms had been used by "people who know how to use these weapons." The pro-government daily Le Palmares asserted that MONUC officials suspect that "one of the DRC's neighbors" may be covertly involved in the Dongo fighting (Note: The neighbor was not specified, but we assume the reference is to Angola, which has recently cooled relations with the DRC and which could see in the current environment a threat to its enclave of Cabinda, on the Atlantic Coast between the DRC and the ROC. End note).

¶7. (SBU) UNHCR estimates that between 74,000-77,000 DRC civilians have fled to the ROC. WFP Kinshasa predicted the Dongo area would remain unstable in the near-term, preventing return by those within the DRC or from the ROC. IDP numbers could even increase. The South Ubangi region is inaccessible for humanitarian workers due to security concerns. The UN has banned travel to the region for employees of its agencies. WFP has pre-positioned 400,000 metric tons of food at Betu to be able to respond to needs as soon as the affected area becomes safer.

Something more devious afoot?

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¶8. (S) In a discussion with polcouns, MONUC Senior Political Advisor Zubaida Rasel claimed that the situation in Dongo was explosive, implying that the nascent rebellion could possibly even affect regime stability in Kinshasa. Although the conflict had started as a local conflict over fishing rights, according to Rasel, ex-MLC, ex-FAZ (Armed Forces of Zaire, i.e., ex-Mobutu army elements), and ex-FAR/Interahamwe have taken advantage of the dispute to somehow coalesce into a well-armed, well-trained group (Note: Most observers agree there are large arms caches in Equateur, left behind from the 1998-2003 fighting. End note). According to Rasel's sources, between 800-1,500 ex-FAR/Interahamwe have crossed the Ubangi River, coordinating military operations with up to 3,000 ex-MLC/ex-FAX, also recently arrived from the ROC. The same source said 1,000 ex-MLC/ex-FAZ remain in reserve in the ROC. When asked, Rasel said MLC leader Jean-Pierre Bemba was not/not involved in directing the fighting. Many of the ex-MLC forces involved, however, were old Bemba fighters. Rasel said that the leadership of the rebels were younger, QRasel said that the leadership of the rebels were younger, "more western savvy" than Bemba.

¶9. (C) Rasel maintained that the ex-FAR/Interahamwe had decided to participate in the fighting to "open a second FDLR front." In the short-term, this group hoped to alleviate pressure on the FDLR in the Kivus. Rasel claimed that one of the ex-FAR/Interahamwe commanders in Dongo had been chosen to replace FDLR commander Sylvestre Mudacumura, who is reportedly seriously ill. In the medium-term, according to Rasel, the "western ex-FAR/Interahamwe" hope to steadily work across the DRC to link up with the "eastern FDLR." (Comment: On the one hand, this sounds completely unrealistic, with dreams rooted in hopes of replicating Laurent Kabila's march across Zaire in 1997. On the other hand, at the very least, if the ex-FAR/Interahamwe numbers are correct, a force of this size could cause considerable damage given the overstretched and incompetent state of the FARDC. End comment.)

Rwanda and Angola  
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¶10. (S) Rasel insisted that both Rwanda and Angola were very unhappy with Kabila. She claimed that recently both Rwandan CHOD James Kabarebe and Angolan CHOD Francisco Furtado separately called her to say "they were finished with Kabila." Furtado, according to Rasel, remained fixated on obliterating the Forces for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), and believed the DRC could become a rear base for the rebels. In addition, Angola was unhappy with the apparent demotion of DRC presidential advisor Augustin Mwanke Katumba (see reftel and paragraphs 11-14). (Bio note and comment on Rasel: In our opinion, Rasel is one of our more astute and well-connected MONUC interlocutors. She has served several tours in the DRC, as well as in Angola, so her contact list in the region is deep and wide. On the other hand, her analysis is often alarmist and she may exaggerate her access to senior officials in the region. End bio note and comment.)

Katumba Mwanke  
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¶11. (C) Reftel provided information on the resignation of Augustin Katumba Mwanke as Executive Secretary of the ruling government coalition, the Alliance for a Presidential Majority (AMP). Although Katumba still maintains his seat in the National Assembly and appears to remain close to Kabila, he has unquestionably lost some influence for the moment. There is much speculation regarding what provoked Katumba's resignation. An embassy contact, with good access to the presidency put forward three reasons for Katumba's "downfall"

(paras. 12-14 below):

¶12. (C) The Kamerhe Affair: According to our contact, when former National Assembly President Vital Kamerhe voiced parliamentary concerns about the decision to allow joint DRC-Rwandan military operations (Umoja Wetu) in the Kivus in early 2009, Katumba, whom many regarded as the power behind the throne, counseled Kabila to remove Kamerhe. Questioning the constitutionality of such a move, Kamerhe insisted he would leave only if voted out by deputies. Kamerhe's resignation speech, highlighting respect for parliament, the constitution, and rule of law, only increased his popularity among fellow deputies. Many in Kabila's inner circle, according to our contact, believed Katumba had ultimately given the president bad advice.

¶13. (C) The China Deal: The deal, with China granting the DRC a \$9 billion loan, had broad support within the presidency, our contact stated. Many, however, began to criticize the secretive way in which Katumba had arranged the deal without any coordination with Western donors or the IMF. When the international community raised concerns about the deal, Kabila, who did not want to unnecessarily antagonize donors, ordered Katumba to "fix the situation." Although an acceptable compromise appears to be near, many Kabilists blame Katumba for the bad press on the China deal.

¶14. (C) Relations with Angola: According to our contact, Angola exposed DRC Communications Minister Lambert Mende's involvement in a corrupt oil deal, which Katumba apparently arranged. Katumba reportedly facilitated the sale of a number of Congolese oil blocks, which Luanda believed belonged to Angola. Compounding the issue, Katumba then sold the blocks to friends, including Israeli businessman Dan Gertler, who have no capacity to exploit the fields. They QGertler, who have no capacity to exploit the fields. They rather plan to sell their concessions to major oil companies. Our contact claimed Angola became infuriated with Kinshasa, even before the tit-for-tat expulsions in September and October (Comment: Other sources, privately and in the press, have speculated that Katumba was "Angola's man" in Kinshasa. This counter viewpoint suggests Katumba's removal was an intentional move by Kabila to reduce Luanda's influence in Kinshasa. While the two theories seem contradictory, they are not mutually incompatible: Katumba may have angered the Angolans with his oil deals, but Katumba's demotion may not be an attempt to patch up relations with the GoA, but is rather the result of a domestic political consideration. End comment).

¶15. (S) Comment: While there is little to directly link these events -- fighting in Equateur, Angolan discontent with the GDRC, and Katumba's apparent demotion -- the confluence of circumstantial evidence linking them is troubling. What appears clear is the following: the Dongo fighting is more than a conflict between clans, and Angola is increasingly

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dissatisfied with the Kabila regime. These two points, combined with growing insecurity in the Kivus, represents an enormous challenge for Kabila. Rasel's portrayal of a regime in danger may be exaggerated, but perhaps not by a great deal. Many parts of the puzzle remain unclear or hard to explain, e.g., why would Kigali work with Angola against the GDRC, if part of the plans was to create an ex-FAR/Interahamwe front in the West? Kabila's worst nightmare is for his two most powerful neighbors, Angola and Rwanda, to form an alliance against him. We do not see convincing signs of that yet, but in the shadowy world of Central African power politics, it cannot be discounted. End comment.

GARVELINK